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Antwerp Cathedral.

(B. Reeve, in the 'Christian Pictorial.')

The continental cathedrals are the museums of sacred art, and in them, more often than in the picture galleries, are preserved the best works of the old masters. Antwerp, rich in its associations with Rubens, the greatest of the Flemish painters, contains in its principal church not only his most famous picture, 'The Descent from the Cross,' but others of almost equal merit, and quite a number of specimens by distinguished members of the same school.

The building of the cathedral was commenced in 1352 and finished in 1559. Over sixty men are constantly employed keeping it in repair. It is a Gothic structure, with a spire numbering among the finest on the continent, being nearly 400 feet in height, and possessing a splendid peal of bells, the largest of which, named Carolus, after Charles V., weighs 16,000 pounds, and requires the strength of sixteen men to ring it. These bells were hung in 1483. The clock is of slightly earlier construction (1457-8.) The interior of the cathedral is richly ornamented with paintings and wood carving. Some valuable paintings by Otto Venus, Van Dyck and others, have been collected and added quite recently. 'The Marriage at Cana' and 'Christ in the Sepulchre,' by Martin de Vas, and several pictures by Otto Venus, represent the two generations immediately prior to Rubens, of whose works the cathedral possesses four. The chief of these, 'The Descent from the Cross,' is regarded as the most eloquent Scriptural painting in the world and is the main attraction to the church; but its companion, 'The Elevation of the Cross' (1610), is scarcely inferior to it. 'The Ascension of the Blessed Virgin' (1626), forms the high altar piece. It was acquired at a cost of 16,000 florins, and is said to have been completed in sixteen days. The remaining example by Rubens, 'The Resurrection of Jesus Christ' (1611), is smaller than the rest, but is a beautiful specimen of the artist's work. One feels a longing to stand before the masterpieces and absorb their every detail, but the guide, though courteous, is a man of business and cannot afford too much time to each. We should probably come again and again until we had in some measure satisfied our longing, were it not for the fact that each occasion means an expenditure of one franc for admission to the church and another as the guide's fee, except on Friday mornings, when, however, the great pictures are concealed by curtains. The chapter of Antwerp Cathedral should be a wealthy corporation, and the position of verger a lucrative post!

Rubens had a fancy, so says the attendant, for incorporating into his pictures the portraits of the members of his family and other acquaintances; thus, his three wives, his father, grandfather, sister-in-law, and pupils are represented in



ANTWERP CATHEDRAL.

his paintings in the guise of Scriptural characters.

Upon a pillar in the Chapel of the Virgin is a painting on white marble representing the face of Jesus Christ, with full eyes, which gaze on you at every turn. It is more than 400 years old, and has been attributed to several artists, but is probably the work of Murillo, whose portrait of Francis of Assisi is in the south transept.

The carved pulpit (1610) represents the four quarters of the globe; and, according to the custodian, that in the Cathedral at Brussels (1652) was copied from it. Having seen both, however, I cannot support his assertion. The one at Antwerp is less cumbersome, but that at Brussels is far more bold and original in its design. The choir stalls, which, like much of the stained glass, are modern, contain a very curious feature. The English tourist looks incredulous when the guide confidently assures him that 'he has Mr. Gladstone and the Earl of Beaconsfield' in the church; yet one is compelled afterwards to admit the reasonableness of the assertion. Upon one side of the chancel is a

head bearing an unmistakable likeness to the venerable statesman whose features we know so well; whilst immediately opposite is the figure of a monk, which only requires the addition of the curly lock upon the forehead and the tuft of beard to complete its resemblance to the departed Primrose leader. This singularity was observed about eleven years since by some English visitors; but, according to the artists themselves, it is quite unintentional.

A line of brass running through the stone pavement in front of the chancel marks the exact centre of old Antwerp in 1600.

On the outer wall of the tower, by the side of the west entrance to the church, is a slab to the memory of Quentin Matsys, the blacksmith of Louvain, who, to win a bride, left his forge and became an artist. The anvil, hammer, and pincers are emblems of the arduous toil of his earlier years, while the palette and brushes tell of the nobler art to which his after life was given. Almost immediately in front of this is a well, surmounted by a wrought-iron canopy, a specimen of Matsys' skill in his first occupation.